

# Tim Tests It: Bling vs Budget

By Tim Barnes-Clay, Motoring Journalist



**Bling:** Audi A4 S Line Saloon

If you're after a prestige symbol in the compact executive car market then four shiny silver rings should do it.

The Audi emblem of four linked circles will elevate your standing in the hierarchical world of business in an instant.

The logo denotes one of Germany's oldest automobile manufacturers and it has represented quality for generations. It symbolizes the merger in 1932 of four previously independent motor vehicle producers: Audi, DKW, Horch and Wanderer.

Audis tend to have a less aggressive perceived image than, say, BMWs and, to some extent, the make is still an enigma. Why? Well, it's a high-end luxury brand, but its philosophy has always been about understatement. It's never been about shouting from every rooftop – and that tends to be appreciated by motorists who want motion without commotion.

The redesigned bumpers are striking with their angular air inlets, their revised grilles and the flat front fog lights. The headlights have also changed, with a slight wave at the bottom edges, and a rearranged interior. Xenon plus headlights are available as optional equipment, but standard on the sportier S line model I tested. The taillights reflect the shape of the headlights, and have harmonized strips of light-emitting diodes (LEDs). The bumper, with its diffuser insert, hints at the car's athleticism, as does the exhaust system, with its twin tailpipes.

What's more, CO2 emissions are only 120g/km and an average of up to 61.4mpg can be teased from the tank. This means the Audi A4 is made for mile-munching and so, along with its tasteful image, will serve any senior manager who 'lives on the road' very well indeed.

## AUDI A4 - FAST FACTS

- Max speed: 143 mph
- 0-62 mph: 8.2 secs
- Combined mpg: 61.4
- Engine: 1968 cc 4 cylinder 16 valve turbo diesel
- Max. power (bhp): 175 at 4200 rpm
- Max. torque (lb/ft): 280 at 1750-2500 rpm
- CO2: 120 g/km
- Price: £29,635 on the road



**Budget:** Dacia Duster Access 1.6 4x4

The Duster is so basic that my wife took five minutes to figure out how to open the tailgate. She then remembered how cars used to work years ago – and she pressed the button you stick the key in – and voilà, the boot opened.

That says a lot about what the Dacia brand is all about. It strips away all the frills we have become used to on our motors. The Duster certainly doesn't cosset you or pretend it's anything other than a crude four-wheel-drive Sport Utility Vehicle (SUV). Step inside and you feel like you're sitting in something from the late 80s. The Renault owned Romanian automaker obviously loves plastic.

There's so much of the stuff that the cabin reeks of it. The dashboard is just one big slab of synthetic material, with all the appeal of that long forgotten Tupperware box in the back of your mum's cupboard. But the boot, once you've worked out how to get into it, is surprisingly square and spacious.

As you might expect with all-wheel-drive, road-holding is impressive. You have the option to twist a dial in the cabin to turn four-wheel-drive on or off – so you have plenty of control over when you want to engage all four corners. I didn't venture off the tarmac, but given the ride height of the Duster and the impressive grip in normal circumstances, I reckon this bit of Romanian rough will see you through a British winter or over a rutted field.

The Dacia may come without any icing on the cake, but the Access model, on test here, is Britain's most affordable new SUV. It starts at £8,995 for the two wheel drive model, and my 4x4 version will only set you back £10,995.

## DACIA DUSTER - FAST FACTS

- Max speed: 99 mph
- 0-62 mph: 12.8 secs
- Combined mpg: 35.3
- Engine 1598 cc, 4 cylinders, 16 valve, petrol
- Max. power (bhp): 105 at 5750 rpm
- Max. torque (lb/ft): 109 at 3750 rpm
- CO2: 185 g/km
- Price: £10,995

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## Tim's Top Tips For Buying A New Car

Buying the latest 63 plate means you'll get a manufacturer-backed warranty; you won't have to face an MOT test for three years and you might be able to gain from special offers on servicing packages.

On the other hand, there are downsides to steer clear of. Concealed extras can bring unpleasant surprises, and speedy depreciation means that an up-to-the-minute motor comes at a price.

Here are my top tips if you're getting in the mood for a brand new car purchase:

### Budget with care:

- Aim to keep a new vehicle for at least three years to smooth out the cost of rapid early depreciation
- Make sure your budget includes insurance and road tax
- If you need to borrow cash, shop around for a loan before visiting the dealer. It'll be cheaper than a finance package.

### Watch out for hidden extras:

- Ensure the price-tag includes delivery charges and number plates
- Confirm any special features or extras you want are included in the cost.

### If you're part-exchanging, price your car sensibly:

- Get clued up about your car's value, based on its age, condition and mileage
- Concentrate on the 'cost to change' – if you negotiate a good reduction on a new vehicle, you're unlikely to get a generous trade-in for your old motor
- You should be able to get more for the car by selling privately but that can be time-consuming compared with the ease of driving to the dealer and motoring away in the new one.
- Be wary of minimum trade-in promotions. They might look desirable, but may only be obtainable if you take the dealer's finance package.

### Negotiate:

- Many car dealers will have allowed for bartering in agreeing a price
- Remember your budget though – don't get carried away.

### Agree collection or delivery:

- Don't hand over cash until you're satisfied with the collection or delivery arrangements
- Try to plan the handover of the new car when the dealer's not too busy. They can then put aside enough time to help get you acquainted with controls and any set-up required.

### Familiarise yourself with the warranty conditions before you sign:

- You may need to fork-out for regular checks done to ensure the long-term anti-corrosion warranty remains valid
- Automakers can't insist that you get the car serviced by a franchise dealer during the warranty period but you must still get it serviced according to the manufacturer's recommended schedule and criteria using only manufacturer approved parts. You'll have to keep records so you can demonstrate servicing was undertaken properly
- It's worth bearing in mind that if anything goes wrong after the warranty expires, a manufacturer is more likely to show goodwill towards any claim if the car has been serviced by one of their dealers
- Don't be coerced into buying. Walk away if you're not absolutely happy.